

President's Annual Report

2015-2016

As President of the society, it is my pleasure to report on the society's activities over the past twelve months.

On August 18, the week after our 2015 annual meeting, we received word that the society had been awarded a \$5,000 grant from The 1772 Foundation to replace some of the support beams on the third floor of the windmill. The grant and a matching grant from the Buttrick Building Fund at The Philadelphia Foundation made it possible for us to complete a series of planned improvements to the historic mill that had begun in 2011 with the installation of exterior signs explaining the history and working of the mill to those who could not or did not choose to go through the structure.

The day after the grant announcement, on August 19, Senator Jack Reed, the United States Senator from Rhode Island, visited the museum and the vault. He was impressed both by the exhibit on the many military installations that once existed in Jamestown and by the care that the society takes of the objects and papers in the collection.

It was a great start to a very successful year.

In September, more than 120 members attended our members-only House Tour Preview Party. The next day's House Tour of four houses near the intersection of Walcott Avenue and Racquet Road attracted about 150 more visitors. House Tour Weekend is our only annual fund raiser, so high attendance also helps support our budget. I hope to see you all at this year's cocktail party and tour on September 9th and 10th.

This summer's Windmill Day was equally successful. We counted 225 people entering windmill field – including both the Town Administrator and the Town Council President – and we know we missed some. It was a great day to show off the work done on the second and third floors.

Our free-to-all Windmill Day was paid for in part with a legislative grant, sponsored by our local representative Deb Ruggiero. Thank you, Deb – as always – for helping us realize our plans.

JHS Director Jim Buttrick initiated a new members-only program this spring. We are reaching out to other historic sites in the area and arranging for visits to them by JHS members. So far, we've gone to the Naval War College Museum, Smith's Castle in North Kingstown, and Fort Adams. Later this month, we will be going to Boyd's Mill for the Middletown Historical Society's Founders' Day. If you're a member and you haven't been receiving emails about these trips, talk to me or our Communications chair Delia Klingbeil after the meeting.

In addition, Jane Bentley conducted two walking tours of Narragansett Avenue in July. And we've continued our usual summer programming – the museum opened for weekends after Memorial Day and five days a week after the June solstice. The Wednesday to Sunday schedule continues through Labor Day and then the museum will be open weekends through Columbus Day. The windmill is open weekends and holidays from June 19 to Columbus Day. Keeping either site open requires that a member be present, so if you would like to spend three hours hosting the windmill or the museum, please talk to Judy Bell, our volunteer coordinator.

The society's success in collecting historical information about Jamestown can to some extent be measured by statistics: the catalog of our collection contains a total of 34,101 records each describing an object or related set of objects in the collection. More than 2,700 records were added this year by volunteers under the direction of Dianne Rugh, the Collections Committee chair, working two mornings a week in our town hall vault.

Perhaps more important is our success in providing this information to the public. Program changes mid-year make it difficult to be statically precise. However, we know we reached over 1200 users who made

over 12,200 searches of our database. A number of these individual contacted us for permission to use information and photographs for a variety of purposes.

Sue Maden and I were among the people who used material from the collection. On April 25, Arcadia Publishing and The History Press published our new book, *Historic Tales of Jamestown*, which depends greatly on the material and photographs in the society's collection. All profits from the book go to the society; and the society held a publication party on May 7. Believe it or not, Sue has some books with her tonight, and you can purchase a copy after the meeting outside the library.

The Collections Committee also fields requests for information – on average, about seven a month. Sometimes answering the requests takes quite a bit of research. The requests and their answers are included in the collection so that the same research does not have to be done again.

Exhibits are another way that the society reaches out to the community. This year, your board decided that being in charge of both the Collection and Exhibits was too much for one volunteer and created a separate Museum and Exhibits Committee under Suzi Andrews. Since then, the society has mounted five exhibits in our display case in the library, two exhibits at the Lawn Avenue School, two exhibits in the lobby of the Police Station, and the summer exhibit at the museum on the military's effect on Jamestown. In January, we collaborated with the Jamestown Arts Center and displayed 22 paintings and drawings from the society's collection, plus some of our textiles and china, to create an historic context for the paintings of Nina Baugh, an early 20th century Jamestown and Philadelphia portraitist.

We are currently working with the town to display in Town Hall the weights and measures that the town used to guarantee fair measurement until better technology came along in the mid-20th century. These have been in the historical society's care for many years.

Communications is key to ensuring the society's vibrant presence in the community. We have a website – jamestownhistoricalsociety.org, a Facebook page, and a YouTube account. Frequent emails about society events are sent to members, as well as non-members who have signed up. You can reach the collections catalogue and our online membership and donation forms through the website.

Print media has not been neglected. After canvassing our membership, it was decided that our bi-annual newsletter should continue to be sent both by email and by snail mail – although only the email version is in color for cost reasons. JHS activity columns and history articles appear monthly in the *Jamestown Press*.

In addition to the windmill, which I talked about earlier, the society is responsible for three other historic sites – the 1885 museum, the 1786 Quaker meetinghouse, and the 1776 Conanicut battery.

Maintenance at the museum was primarily in reaction to weather damage. A cover was erected over the HVAC unit that was damaged by the heavy snow in 2014-15. The front storm door was rebuilt because of wind damage. The back door, which was installed in 2007 as an emergency exit, still needs work to protect it from water damage.

The meetinghouse committee keeps the meetinghouse under continual surveillance. We know we will have to replace the roof soon.

Battery Park saw some major work done on the trails that go up Prospect Hill to the west of the Revolutionary War battery. Using a Recreational Trail grant from State of Rhode Island, Department of Environmental Management and Department of Transportation, the society paid for materials needed by an Eagle Scout project to mitigate erosion on the upper trail. The work was completed last month. A Rhode Island Senate grant, sponsored by Senator Teresa Paiva-Weed, is being used for ongoing work on the view corridor to the West Passage.

Financially, the society is in a good position.

The windmill, the meetinghouse, and the battery each have endowments for their maintenance, although the income from these endowments is not sufficient to cover all the costs. The Buttrick Building Fund can

be asked for any major building improvements or maintenance, such as the meetinghouse roof. The general endowment, created by the capital campaign in 2007 and added to by donations and by life memberships since, generated slightly more than 20 percent of the budgeted costs for the 2016 fiscal year. We have received over \$18,000 in donations from our members, in addition to membership dues. Together with the grants this income ensures that the society will not have to reach into its investments to cover anticipated operating costs during 2016.

The major concern, financially, is the meetinghouse, which has endowment/investment income of about \$1,500. However, the society's general endowment and undirected dues/donation income have been sufficient to make up the annual shortfall.

The activities of the society are coordinated by an Executive Committee consisting of the officers. It has the authority to act for the board on most matters between board meetings. The bylaws provide that "The president, with the approval of the board, may appoint to the committee not more than two other board members for such time as the president and board shall determine." This year we took advantage of that provision and appointed Mary Heath to the board and to the Executive Committee. Mary has agreed to serve as president for the 2016-2017 year, and the Executive Committee felt that her early participation in its deliberations would benefit the society.

The board remains fairly static across this election, although we are losing two key members. Larry MacDonald, who has been our Battery Committee chair for six years, has to step down because of our term limit provisions. He has promised to continue as a member of the committee and to help coordinate the 2017 Battery Day celebration. His dedication to preserving the Battery remains undiminished. Terry Lanza has managed our programs, especially our annual house tour and the volunteer party, with ease and aplomb, for three years. We are very sorry to lose them both.

Many of the rest of us are changing hats, as you will see in the Nominations Committee report.

One hat that is changing is my own. When I agreed to be president for this past year, it was with the understanding that the Nominating Committee would work to find a younger and fresher face for the post. They have. And I can go back to being treasurer.

I depended heavily this past year on the board, and they did not let me down. New initiatives – like the trips to other historical sites – began with them. The generally more collaborative style of our activities – the art exhibit with the art center and the integration of library data in our database – began with them. The growth and improvement of our online presence began with them.

I thank them all very much for their support and hard work.

Rosemary Enright